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From the transcendental to the enactive

Abstract

Varga (2012) argues that the sense of reality disrupted in various psychopathologies, including derealization (DR) and depersonalization (DP), is pre-intentional (or in some sense, the product of a more basic, operative intentionality that is pre-predicative). This moves us away from the more dominant conceptions of delusion and the loss of sense of reality as problems best explained in terms of propositional attitudes, like beliefs, or framework propositions (see, e.g., Campbell 2001; Eilan 2000). Furthermore, Varga suggests a certain triadic structure in which DR/DP affects not just the sense of reality, but also the sense of self and our intersubjective relations with others. Reality, self, and others are tied together into a system where psychotic disruptions reverberate across all these dimensions.

Keywords

enactive, transcendental

Disciplines

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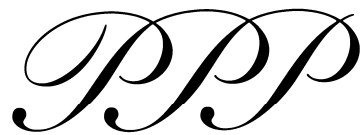
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FROM THE TRANSCENDENTAL TO THE ENACTIVE

SHAUN GALLAGHER



KEYWORDS: delusion, sense of reality, intersubjectivity, embodiment

VARGA (2012) ARGUES that the sense of reality disrupted in various psychopathologies, including derealization (DR) and depersonalization (DP), is pre-intentional (or in some sense, the product of a more basic, operative intentionality that is pre-predicative). This moves us away from the more dominant conceptions of delusion and the loss of sense of reality as problems best explained in terms of propositional attitudes, like beliefs, or framework propositions (see, e.g., Campbell 2001; Eilan 2000). Furthermore, Varga suggests a certain triadic structure in which DR/DP affects not just the sense of reality, but also the sense of self and our intersubjective relations with others. Reality, self, and others are tied together into a system where psychotic disruptions reverberate across all these dimensions.

Varga insightfully appeals to Husserl's phenomenological conception of transcendental or open intersubjectivity as a way to show how our relations with others enter into the co-constitution of reality. One can also appeal to empirical studies to point in this same direction. I would like to pursue this idea, briefly, in the spirit of Merleau-Ponty's question: "Now if the transcendental is intersubjectivity, how can the borders of the transcendental

and the empirical help becoming indistinct?" And his rather dramatically expressed response: "All of my facticity is reintegrated into subjectivity Thus the transcendental descends into history" (Merleau-Ponty 1967, 107). It makes perfect sense to think that whatever one determines to be the case on transcendental grounds, must also be reflected, if not cashed out, in empirical terms open to scientific investigation (see Gallagher 2011).¹

The empirical studies that I have in mind are primarily developmental ones concerning joint attention and secondary intersubjectivity (Trevvarthen 1998; Trevvarthen and Hubley 1978), and studies that support the enactive approach to cognition (e.g., Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991). It is clear from the developmental studies that starting even before 9 months of age infants, who arguably have no concept of belief, who are pre-linguistic in the standard sense, but who relate to others primarily through embodied (sensory-motor) interactions, begin to gain a basic, pragmatic sense of what counts as real, significant, and salient, only by attending *with others* to those environmental objects and states of affairs that those others attend to with interest. The meaningful world is carved out of the physical environment in just those practices and interactions with others that constitute secondary intersubjectivity (the empirical counterpart to Husserl's open intersubjectivity). These intersub-

jective practices include not only joint attention, but those abilities that infants have for grasping the context-determined intentions of others, and for *participatory sense-making* (De Jaegher and Di Paolo 2007; Gallagher 2009).

Participatory sense-making involves making sense of the world, a co-constitution of meaning, through active engagement and coordinated interaction with others. This may take place in play situations as well as in work situations; it is basic to action and perception. On the enactive view, we see the world as meaningful in terms of what we can do with things, what we can reach or not reach, what presents as affordances or disaffordances. Gibson's notion of affordances is ecological, which means it points to the fact that affordances are defined in terms of what we are capable of doing as embodied agents, and what the environment offers. That is, it involves both self and world in their coupled and dynamic relations. This ecological mix, however, necessarily includes others, because we surely learn what things mean, how to handle things, how to deal with things, and how to value things from the actions of others and our own interactions with them. The sense of reality, then, is generated in this, at once, pre-predicative, pragmatic, and social milieu.

Importantly, what we see in studies of joint attention, secondary intersubjectivity, and participatory sense-making pertains not just to infants. It continues to characterize our interactions with others and our action-oriented stance toward reality throughout our lifetime, on both pragmatic and emotional levels. For example, in studies of object evaluation in adults, the gaze of the other person toward an object can draw one's attention to the object. Subjects presented with a face looking toward (or away from) an object evaluate the object as more (or less) likeable than those objects that don't receive much attention from others. When you add an emotional expression to the face, the effect is stronger (Bayliss et al. 2006; 2007). In addition, the quality of the other person's movement is important. Seeing another person act with ease (or without ease) toward an object will influence one's feelings about the object (Hayes et al. 2007). Indeed, my awareness of the gaze of others toward objects or in joint attention

influences my perception of objects in regard to motor action, significance, and emotional salience; the other's regard will have an effect on the way I may come to feel about that object, and it may lead to subsequent action (Becchio, Bertone, and Castiello 2008; Becchio et al. 2007). Our sense of what counts as real and what's significant is firmly rooted in this pervasive pragmatic and social frame of reference, which operates as a 'massive hermeneutical background' (Bruner and Kalmar 1998; Gallagher, in press) for our dealings with the world and with others.

"Firmly rooted," relatively stable, perhaps even transcendental, as Varga suggests, but not unassailable or guaranteed, as psychopathology shows. Varga is right to suggest that purely cognitive accounts of breakdowns like DP and DR in terms of predicative judgments, beliefs, or propositional attitudes are inadequate; likewise, purely cognitive accounts in these terms (and we can add, in terms of theory of mind) of the *generation* of this triadic coupling—self, world, others—are impoverished, if not distorted, insofar as they ignore the embodied and enactive processes at their root.

NOTE

1. I note that Husserl makes the same point: "every analysis or theory of transcendental phenomenology, including the transcendental theory of the constitution of an objective world – can be produced in the natural realm, when we give up the transcendental attitude" (1970 §57).

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